

Brenda C. Desmond
1301 S. Fifth W.
Missoula, MT 59801
(406) 721-6717
bcdesmond@msn.com

February 6, 2007

Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

I speak in support of House Bill 382. I would like to thank Senator Laslovich for his efforts on behalf of mental health courts and their participants.

I am a district court standing master in the Fourth Judicial District (Missoula and Mineral Counties) and I have been involved in the establishment and development of both the Missoula Youth Drug Court and the Missoula Mental Health Court. I appear today as a private citizen on my own behalf.

The Missoula Mental Health Court Docket project began in 2003 to improve the response of the criminal justice system to people with mental illness in the criminal justice system. Since that time, with the assistance of a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice and a community advisory committee, we have planned and begun to implement a mental health court docket in the district court, justice court and municipal court in Missoula County. Our initial results have been positive.

Mental Health Courts are an outgrowth of drug treatment courts and other "problem solving courts" established to address comprehensively the causes of criminal behavior through extended, closely monitored, court-directed, outpatient treatment. Mental health courts are also one part of a national effort to reduce the number of persons with a mental illness who are in custody, but who could be treated and monitored in the community with no increased threat to public safety. Other strategies are jail diversion programs, re-entry programs and specialized pre-trial and probation supervision programs. I hope you will support this promising approach to a serious problem in our communities. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,



Brenda C. Desmond